

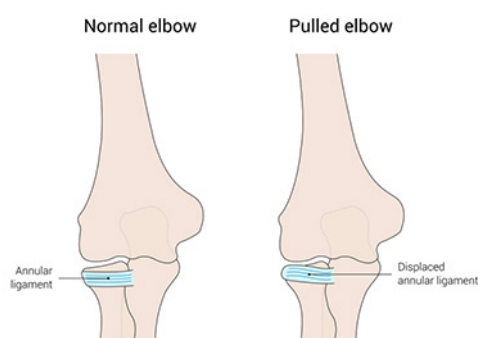
Pulled elbow

Emergency department Patient information

What is a pulled elbow?

A pulled elbow is a common minor injury which can affect children under the age of five. It occurs when one of the forearm bones, called the radius, partially slips out of a ring-shaped ligament at the elbow. It is extremely rare for it to cause any long-term problems. It can occur because a child's joints are not completely developed and the ring shaped ligament is looser in early childhood.

It usually happens when the child's arm is accidentally pulled, e.g. falling over while an adult is holding their hand or pulling an arm through a sleeve while dressing. The child usually cries briefly and is then reluctant to use that arm.



Management

An x-ray of the elbow is not usually necessary as it will not diagnose a pulled elbow.

After being given simple pain relief, your child's arm will need to be moved in a particular way to manipulate the head of the radius bone back into the correct position. This can be painful for a few seconds, but in most cases, they will be able to use their arm again quite quickly after the manoeuvre.

Occasionally it is not possible to solve the problem by performing the manoeuvre the first time. If this occurs, the arm is usually rested in a sling and we will arrange to see the child again in our Emergency Department clinic a few days later. Often it resolves itself before you are seen again, but if not, another attempt may be needed.

If you have any concerns, please come back to the Emergency Department or see your GP.

The Royal Bournemouth Hospital, Castle Lane East, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH7 7DW
Poole Hospital, Longfleet Road, Poole, Dorset, BH15 2JB

Author: Laura Jukes Date: June 2023 Version: One Review date: June 2026 Ref: 556/21